

But, then, are there any laws to keep?
 What Justinian
 or Napoleon has ever codified literature? Who
 set up
 judges over the poets? Are their judgements
 needful?
 Are they even helpful? How often can they be
 trusted
 even to be true? Perhaps I am by
 temperament too
 sceptical, too full of rebellion against all
 authorities and
 supposed experts, too unsociable and
 individualistic in a
 rooted hatred of all 'movements' and
 'schools', coteries
 and conventicles, to be fair to criticism of this
 sort. For
 there can be no doubt that it is highly helpful
 to the
 coteries, at least. Critical formulas they love
 and live on,
 These are their banners and their battle-cries.
 By these
 they create; by these they judge what they
 have created to
 be perfect, and most other writers
 worthless. But how
 far the judgements of critics have helped that
 literature
 which has stood the only real test, the
 judgement of Time,
 remains much more doubtful; indeed, it
 would not be
 difficult to argue, I think, without going so far
 as Flaubert
 and dismissing all criticism as worthless, that
 their ver-
 dicts have, on the whole, been less help than
 hindrance«
 to the writers of the past.

Certainly the greatest works of Antiquity
 and of the
 Middle Ages, which, after all, can face
 comparison with
 anything modern, were produced in societies
 where pro-
 fessional criticism did not exist and would
 have been
 considered a very curious occupation for an

able-minded
human being: so that this midwifery of
critics is clearly
not essential to the safe delivery of genius,
nor their
nursing to its preservation. It was only in
the autumn
of the Ancient World that these buzzing
creatures were
first engendered: in declining Athens, in half-
barbarous
Alexandria, in Rome under the heel of the
Caesars. Then
it was that the first bright spirits appeared to
demonstrate
to an admiring world that Homer snored
and Virgil